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BOOK REVIEWS.

NATIONAL IDEALISM AND A STATE CHURCH: A constructive essay on religion. By Stanton Coit, Ph. D. London: Williams & Norgate, 14 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W. C., 1907.

The turn of the century has been marked by developments of religious thought which seem not without import for the future of our Angle-Saxon culture. In no department of that culture have the disintegrating tendencies of the last thirty years been more marked than in that of religion, and nowhere else has the longing for the unity of a common belief seemed at once so wistful and so hopeless. But lately there have appeared on the religious horizon phenomena which it may not be rash to interpret as the first faint signs of another day. It is surely significant that now, with the noise of the battle between religion and science hardly yet behind us, we should find in our midst a leading scientist endeavoring to devise a new Christian catechism, and a leading popular preacher rationalizing Christian theology, both enterprises meeting with so much acceptance and—what is not less significant—such intelligent opposition. In one way, of course, this is not new. All through the conflict there have been thinkers who would fain harmonize science with the spiritual life of man. But somehow none of those older apostles of conciliation could ever strike the true note of sincerity. The old-fashioned “Christian philosopher” might patch up a truce with science; but he never convinced us that he had come to an understanding with it. The secret was that he could not settle accounts with a power which neither he nor his age really knew. As yet the scientific spirit had not sufficiently penetrated general culture to make people conscious how uncompromising its demands really were. It was still possible to fancy that science might waive its claims at points if other interests became too deeply involved. Reconciliation therefore could never be more than temporary compromise. Things have rather altered now. Recent movements of religious thought seem to prove it possible for a writer to give the scientific consciousness its full and unrestricted due, and still appeal to a religious public. Among such symptoms this book from the hand of the founder of the ethical movement is one, and one to which we do not hesitate to give an important place.

Doctor Coit has two fundamental tenets in his creed. He believes in science, and believes in democracy. The task of his book is to show how the reintegration of England into a religious unity could be brought about if the state church would divest itself of everything inconsistent with these two principles.

The program is sufficiently bold. It will be a misfortune, however, if either its boldness or the occasionally prophetic, sometimes even a little bombastic tones in which it is set forth should repel sober readers or induce them to dismiss the book as hare-brained. It is really very far from being so. It is the work of one who is laboring, unless we are very far mistaken, in the midstream of English religious development, and who has something of real importance to say to his generation.

Doctor Coit opens his work by an attack upon a certain anti-scientific and anti-democratic traffic in the occult, which has characterized some recent religious psychology. Religion is degraded, according to the author, when it is taken (as it is, *e. g.*, by Professor James) to be a private dealing of the individual soul with some mysterious, eruptive, psychical power welling up from within himself. The religious life of the individual is really but the focusing in a concrete personality of powers already latent throughout society. Ecclesiastical institutions, so far from being, as Professor James would imply, superfluous to religious genius, are its indispensable engendering and nourishing media.

The contention that the community and not the individual is the true religious unit presents all the apology required for undertaking the work which the author conceives as the mission of his book. In being a community at all, England is already potentially a religious whole; but actually—to her great spiritual loss—"her religious forces remain to a large extent in a state of anarchy and chaos." But a true unity is within the reach of religious leaders, were they to undertake a conscious reconstruction on a wise and courageous scale. The quasi-scientific objection to such a scheme of religious transformation, *viz.*, that great developments of a nation's spiritual life cannot be consciously planned but must come by a natural growth, may be dismissed. According to the author, it is but a "colossal and lamentable blunder," due to our foisting conceptions derived from biology on the facts of human society. It is just the distinctive feature of human as distinct from animal history, that its upward evolution has been everywhere conditioned by conscious effort.

Is it possible, then, that the state church should be so transformed as to reabsorb the national religious life which has already grown so far apart from it? What separates it from the general culture of the nation? According to our author, it is its anti-democratic character and its supernaturalism. The path of true reform, therefore, lies in democratizing the church; *i. e.*, receiving back into its fold the sects which have broken away from it and now war against it, admitting them as parties within it just as the political parties are admitted within the nation; and, secondly, in withdrawing from the church's forms of worship whatever offends against the scientific spirit.

Doctor Coit's scheme is plainly drastic; and he does not at all think the Church of England is going soon to adopt it. Yet it is hard to withstand his claim that the ideas he is expressing meet with private acceptance by thousands of thinking people within the church as well as outside of it. In fact, if one thinks of the substance of his proposal rather than its accidents and details, it almost inevitably appears as advanced rather than eccentric—as a proposal which, twenty years ago, would have met with much less acceptance than now, and which, twenty years hence, may meet with much greater acceptance. The test question, of course, is here as always: Is it possible that the spirit of the time should work with the reformer? The non-revolutionary spirit of our age is fain to preserve the identity of its ancient institutions. Would the identity of the original institution, then, really survive the shocks of such a transformation as Doctor Coit proposes? Suppose the plan carried out, should we still have a Christian religion and a Church of England?

The author's answer, of course, is in the affirmative. The justification for it must be gathered from various portions of his book.

In a chapter on the "Growth of Liturgies"—to begin with that—the writer seeks to justify his position from history. He shows how, all through the past, conscious effort on the part of reverent and gifted minds has modified old forms without discarding them—reshaped creeds, prayers and hymns to serve new needs. And in a tone which reminds one of Plato he calls upon the imaginative genius of our own day to discharge its debt to the state by the creation of a new national manual of religious services. Why should the clergy, to the profound regret of so many of the best of their own number, remain bound to the rubric and unable to accept any variation of the prescribed service? Had they had

such a privilege and had it always, there would not now have been that apathy of the literary laity which makes it so impossible to enlist their interest in the idea of a great national ritual. Had the Church been commissioned from the first to keep adapting her prayer-book as well as her other appurtenances according as need arose, what a difference might have been! She might have employed as great a portion of the dramatic and literary genius of Christendom as she actually has employed of its architectural or musical genius. She might have had Shakespeare in her service as well as Michelangelo. In our own day, too, it might have been as natural as it is actually impossible to think of such representative men as Mr. Kipling, Mr. William Watson, Mr. Chesterton, or Mr. Shaw writing for the Church. For genius should come to the service of religious ideas if they are universal and living. It did come to the Church when her ideas were living.

But how to make the ideas of the church really live? Dr. Coit reserves the detail of this task for a future volume. He is shortly to publish a study of the Book of Common Prayer, showing how much living truth he thinks it contains. Meanwhile he expresses, in a chapter on "A Revised Prayer-book," the guiding principles of such an undertaking. He believes that there is a deep and widespread craving for a form of religious service in which thinking men and women can take unreserved part. That is attainable only when the already mentioned conditions are fulfilled; *i. e.*, when our historic manual of religious services is made thoroughly democratic in spirit and purged of the whole supernatural element. In such a manual the author places a very large faith. He conceives it as standing, somehow, so near the focus toward which the silent logic of the time is leading serious men of every creed, that if it be but properly formulated it must eventually form a bond of religious cohesion round the best minds, not only Protestant and Catholic, but Christian, Jew and Agnostic; and that it is capable at last of gathering round it the masses of the English nation and welding them once more into a religious unity.

In two chapters, entitled, "Anglicanism plus Humanism," and "Anglicanism plus Democracy," the author seeks to show some of the changes which the introduction of these principles into our religious forms would involve. It would necessitate the definite rejection of all belief in the work of supernatural agencies in the spiritual life of man. All the redemptive power, for instance,

of which the human soul can avail itself must be regarded as latent and working in society, not derived from supernatural beings beyond society. The conceptions of God, Christ, Devil, and so forth, if they imply agencies external to man, actuating him in his good or bad deeds, are to be discarded as false and fundamentally pernicious. It is the principle of all moral responsibility "that no crime and no good deed that happens in this world shall ever be traced to any other moral agencies than those actually inhabiting living human bodies and recognized by other human beings as fit subjects of human rights and privileges." This formula, Doctor Coit avows, expresses the principle on which his whole reconstructive effort is based, a principle which he believes is widely prevalent among the thinking and ruling classes in England, and which for want of a better name he calls Naturalism.

Besides purging and supplementing the church's ritual, this principle would change the fundamental character of its preaching. The author vents some sarcasm in this chapter upon the unaffected blindness of our religious leaders who, in seeking a reason for the loss of their hold upon the masses, have found it in every possible circumstance except the obvious one, namely, that they were preaching the wrong thing. The masses are really hungering for preaching which will mean something to them. If it be asked where they will get it, the author replies, in sermons like John Ball's, inspired by a rational faith in the coming of the kingdom of heaven among the masses of men in the form of an ideal democracy already foreshadowed in the constitution of the church.

The author does not disguise from himself or his reader the magnitude of such a program. He asserts, on the contrary, that its full accomplishment can only be the work of first-rate religious genius. His own work he justifies on the ground that we cannot fold the hands and wait for genius. We must prepare its way—strive to create the demand which it will come to fulfil. But how much of the identity of church and faith and ritual would such a program of reform leave? This is the really important question; and it is to be feared the reader will find it hard to draw any very satisfactory answer to it from Doctor Coit's statements.

What is wanted, according to our author, is a scientific religion. He acknowledges that this would be something new in the his-

tory of religions. Yet, he holds, it would be only relatively, not absolutely new. This can only mean that it would be continuous with—a legitimate and necessary development of—whatever is the true essence of ordinary supernaturalistic Christianity. It is chiefly in his two penultimate chapters that Doctor Coit specifies what part of this currently accepted religion the "Naturalist" can preserve. A religion of Naturalism would still admit, he says, of prayer, and would utilize almost all the current religious terms and phrases. The essence of prayer, the author holds, is petition to some outside being or beings for blessings which actually come in response. A religion of Naturalism might believe in this; for quite apart from supernaturalistic presuppositions it is possible. In fact, it is always happening. "Men and women out of work insert in the daily papers a statement of their predicament; and their prayer is answered." The head of an institution circulates an appeal and gets what he needs. "Suppose a person were to utter the petitions, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' and 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,' to the men and women about him, believing that they could give him the physical and moral support he needed. Suppose he were filled with a profound sense of his dependence upon them and upon their willingness. Then all the elements of religious intensity and hope would be in him. Also there would be powers at hand mighty to save, needing only to be asked in sincerity. How then can it be said that these two clauses of the Lord's Prayer have no meaning unless we believe in a supernatural personal agency?" (p. 241). To the "Naturalist," then, prayer is real and efficacious; and that not merely because of its reflex action—not merely because it implies aspiration, and aspiration is good for him who aspires—but because it also is positively answered by outside beings and powers. Nor need our petitions be directed to the living only. We may address the great dead, as Wordsworth addresses Milton, and get our fresh baptism of their spirit in return.

Finally, the "Naturalist," because he retains religion, is justified in retaining religious terms. He will retain the term "religion" itself, for instance. Religion does not necessarily imply belief in anything supernatural. People are religious when they "focus their attention steadfastly and reverently upon some being from whom they believe that they derive the greatest benefits, and from which they believe that this focusing of the attention

will occasion their deriving still further benefits" (p. 290, 291). This the "Naturalist" may do with perfect sincerity and intelligence. Again, "People ask: What is God? But they forget or have never realized the import of the question they put. They mean: What is that real being which men ought to focus their steadfast and reverent attention upon in order to derive from it those benefits which are really the greatest blessings to mankind? They are asking a moral and scientific question" (p. 295). Seeing the answer to such a question is a statement of fact continuous with all natural fact, this term too may be retained by the "Naturalistic Humanist." Similarly with the word "Christ." Though we discard all his traditional supernatural offices, the name may be retained to designate that ideal life portrayed in the Gospels, and the "Redeemer-principle" which rose into self-consciousness for the salvation of the world, in the man Jesus. Pleas are advanced on similar lines for the retention—even the reinstatement—of other religious terms: Sin, Salvation, Heaven, Hell, Devil and many more. The author closes his book with a long and effective plea, full of acute observation and analysis, setting forth the urgent necessity of having our enlightened faith embellished with all the solemn charm of a noble ritual.

Despite their earnestness and extraordinary skill, these later chapters of the book are not genuinely successful. They are perhaps the chapters which the serious and thoughtful reader will linger longest over. But we believe that when he tries to gather from them those elements of the accepted religion which survive Doctor Coit's analysis, he will hardly persuade himself that he has retained the essence of it; or at least he will not easily maintain himself at that point of view. Not improbably he will be distracted between two contradictory impressions—on the one hand the glad surprise of discovery that the forms of his religion contain truths deeper than he ever knew, and on the other hand the sickening suspicion that they are all but dead leaves. The source of the inadequacy is partly no doubt simply that the book is philosophical and not the expression of religious genius. But it is possible, we think, to locate the trouble nearer than that. Doctor Coit writes with all the power of a mind which from sheer spiritual necessity has had to beat out for itself a track from science to religion. But he has not clearly thought out the relation of the two spheres; or else he does not succeed in keeping

their relation steadily before his mind. Hence an incompatibility—which will be felt even by the reader who cannot formulate it—between the constructive effort of the work and the overweening frankness of the writer's negative statements. He insists so relentlessly on the banishment of supernaturalism and all its works, that his retention of the terms of supernaturalism—particularly his somewhat curious anxiety to retain its vocabulary in full—carries with it an unavoidable air of whimsicality. The same applies to his statements about agency. He declares roundly that no author of human deeds can be admitted except one that inhabits a human body and is a subject of human rights. Yet the whole spirit of his book betrays a consciousness, keen almost as Wordsworth's, of the presence of agency in the universe far beyond what ever was or will be focused in the heart of any mere man. His scientific horror of the supernatural makes him deny to it any shred of truth whatever, and obscures to him the all-important fact that even supernaturalism *misrepresents something*—and something important, namely, the transcendent aspect of spirit. It is his failure to lay hold of this essence of supernaturalism and carry it forward that we think the weak point of his book. Yet, if the distinction be permissible, the inadequacy lies only in the philosophic unsteadiness of the author's thinking, not in the fundamental nature of his case. It is well, in a book like his, to err by sounding the negative note too loudly. This is what divides his work from the feeble compromises of the past and places it in a new category. It is impossible not to believe that his ideal of an enlightened religion which has finally come to terms with the scientific consciousness is in tune with the most characteristic trend of our national life, and also that it is rendered less of a dream and is brought nearer the region of sane prophecy by this plain, strong presentment of it.

J. W. SCOTT.

Glasgow.

THE HISTORY OF FREEDOM, AND OTHER ESSAYS. Pp. xxxix, 630.
HISTORICAL STUDIES AND ESSAYS. Pp. 544. By the first Lord Acton. Edited by J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence. Two Vols. London and New York: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

The essays collected in these volumes, though dealing for the most part with historical problems and incidents, are not without